

WHISPERING SMITH

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ILLUSTRATIONS
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SYNOPSIS.

Murray Sinclair and his gang of wreckers were called out to clear the railroad tracks at Smoky Creek. McCloud, a young road superintendent, caught Sinclair and his men in the act of looting the wrecked train. Sinclair pleaded innocence, declaring it only amounted to a small sum—a treat for the men. McCloud discharged the whole outfit and ordered the wreckage burned. McCloud became acquainted with Dickie Dunning, a girl of the west, who came to look at the wreck. She gave him a message for Sinclair. "Whispering" Gordon Smith told President Bucks of the railroad, of McCloud's brave fight against a gang of wreckers and that was the reason for the superintendent's appointment to his high office. McCloud arranged to board at the boarding house of Mrs. Sinclair, the ex-foreman's deserted wife. Dickie Dunning was the daughter of the late Richard Dunning, who had died of a broken heart shortly after his wife's demise, which occurred after one year of married life. Sinclair visited Marion Sinclair's shop and a fight between him and McCloud was narrowly averted. Smoky Creek bridge was mysteriously burned. McCloud prepared to face the situation. President Bucks notified Smith that he had work ahead. McCloud worked for days and finally got the division running in fairly good order. He overheard Dickie criticizing his methods, to Marion Sinclair.

CHAPTER IX.

Sweeping Orders.

The burning of Smoky Creek bridge was hardly of the minds of the mountain men when a disaster of a different sort befell the division. In the Rat valley east of Sleepy Cat the main line springs between two ranges of hills with a dip and a long supported grade in each direction. At the point of the dip there is a switch from which a spur runs to a granite quarry. The track for two miles is straight and the switch-target and lights are seen easily from either direction save at one particular moment of the day—a moment which is in the valley neither quite day nor quite night. Down this grade, a few weeks after the Smoky Creek fire, came a double-headed stock train from the Short Line with 40 cars of steers. The switch stood open; this much was afterward abundantly proved. The train came down the grade very fast to gain speed for the hill ahead of it. The head engineer, too late, saw the open target. He applied the emergency air, threw his engine over, and whistled the alarm. The mightiest efforts of a dozen engines would have been powerless to check the heavy train. On the quarry track stood three flat cars loaded with granite blocks for the abutment of the new Smoky Creek bridge. On a sanded track, rolling at 30 miles an hour and screaming in the clutches of the burning brakes, the heavy engines struck the switch like an avalanche, reared upon the granite-laden flats, and with 40 loads of cattle plunged into the canyon below; not a car remained on the rails. The head brakeman, riding in the second cab, was instantly killed, and the engine crews, who jumped, were badly hurt.

The whole operating department of the road was stirred. What made the affair more dreadful was that it had occurred on the time of Number Six, the east-bound passenger train, held that morning at Sleepy Cat by an engine failure. Glover came to look into the matter. The testimony of all tended to one conclusion—that the quarry switch had been thrown at some time between 4:30 and 5 o'clock that morning. Inferences were many: Tramps during the early summer had been unusually troublesome and many of them had been rigorously handled by trainmen; robbery might have been a motive, as the express cars on train Number Six carried heavy specie shipments from the coast.

A third and more exciting event soon put the quarry wreck into the background. Ten days afterward an east-bound passenger train was flagged in the night at Sugar Buttes, 12 miles west of Sleepy Cat. When the heavy train slowed up, two men boarded the engine and with pistols compelled the engineer to cut off the express cars and pull them to the water-tank a mile east of the station. Three men there in waiting forced the express car, blew open the safe, and the gang rode away half an hour later loaded with gold coin and currency.

Had a stick of dynamite been exploded under the Wickup there could not have been more excitement at Medicine Bend. Within three hours after the news reached 'he town a posse under Sheriff Van Horn, with a car load of horseflesh and 14 guns, was started for Sugar Buttes. The trail led north and the pursuers rode until nearly midnight. They crossed Dutch flat and rode single file into a wooded canyon, where they came upon traces of a camp-fire. Van Horn, leading, jumped from his horse and thrust his hand into the ashes; they were still warm, and he shouted to his men to ride up. As he called out, a rifle-cracked from the box-elder trees ahead of him. The sheriff fell, sprang through the head, and a deputy springing from his saddle to pick him up was shot in precisely the same way; the posse, thrown into a panic, did not fire a single shot, and for an hour dared not ride back for the bodies. After dark they got the two dead men and at midnight rode with them into Sleepy Cat.

When the news reached McCloud he was talking with Bucks over the wires. Bucks had got into headquarters at the river late that night, and was get-

ting details from McCloud of the Sugar Buttes robbery when the superintendent sent him the news of the killing of Van Horn and the deputy. In the answer that Bucks sent came a name new to the wires of the mountain division and rarely seen even in special correspondence, that Hughie Morrison, who took 'ht message, never forgot that name. Hughie handed the message to McCloud and stood by while the superintendent read:

Whispering Smith is due in Cheyenne to-morrow. Meet him at the Wickup Sunday morning. He has full authority. I have told him to get these fellows, if it takes all the money in the treasury, and not to stop till he cleans them out of the Rocky Mountains. J. S. B.

CHAPTER X.

At the Three Horses.

"Clean them out of the Rocky mountains; that is a pretty good contract," mused the man in McCloud's office on Sunday morning. He sat opposite McCloud in Bucks' old easy chair and held in his hand Bucks' telegram. As he spoke he raised his eyebrows and settled back, but the unusual depth of the chair and the shortness of his legs left his chin helpless in his black tie, so that he was really no better off except that he had changed one position of discomfort for another.

A clerk opened the outer office door. "Mr. Dunning asks if he can see you, Mr. McCloud."

"Tell him I am busy," Bill Dancing, close on the clerk's heels, spoke for himself. "I know it, Mr. McCloud, I know it!" he interposed, urgently, "but let me speak to you just a moment." Hat in hand, Bill, because no one would knock him down to keep him out, pushed into the room. "I've got a plan," he urged, "in regard to getting these hold-ups."

"How are you, Bill?" exclaimed the man in the easy chair, jumping hastily to his feet and shaking Dancing's hand. Then quite as hastily he sat down, crossed his knees violently, stared at the giant lineman, and exclaimed: "Let's have it!"

Dancing looked at him in silence and with some contempt. The train-master had broken in on the superintendent for a moment and the two were conferring in an undertone. "What might your name be, mister?" growled Dancing, addressing with some condescension the man in the easy chair.

The man waved his hand as if it were immaterial and answered with a single word: "Forgotten!"

"How's that?" "Forgotten!" Dancing looked from one man to the other, but McCloud appeared preoccupied and his visitor seemed wholly serious. "I don't want to take too much on myself," Bill began, speaking to McCloud.

"You look as if you could carry a fair-sized load, William, provided it bore the right label," suggested the visitor, entirely amiable.

"But nobody has felt worse over this thing and recent things—" "Recent things," echoed the easy chair.

"—happening to the division than I have. Now I know there's been trouble on the division—"

"I think you are putting it too strong there, Bill, but let it pass."

"—there's been differences; misunderstandings and differences. So I say to myself maybe something might be done to get everybody together and bury the differences, like this: Murray Sinclair is in town; he feels bad over this thing, like any railroad man would. He's a mountain man, quick as the quickest with a gun, a good traller, rides like a fender, and can catch a streak of sunshine traveling on a pass. Why not put him at the head of a party to run 'em down?"

"Run 'em down," nodded the stranger.

"Differences such as be or may be—" "May be—"

"Being discussed when he brings 'em in dead or alive, and not before. That's what I said to Murray Sinclair, and Murray Sinclair is ready for to take hold this minute and do what he can if he's asked. I told him plain I could promise no promises; that, I says, lays with George McCloud. Was I right, was I wrong? If I was wrong, right me; if I was right, say so. All I want is harmony."

The new man nodded approval. "Bully, Bill!" he exclaimed, heartily.

"Mister," protested the lineman, with simple dignity, "I'd just a little rather you wouldn't bully me nor Bill me."

"All in good part, Bill, as you shall see; all in good part. Now before Mr. McCloud gives you his decision I want to be allowed a word. Your idea looks good to me. At first I may say it didn't. I am candid; I say it didn't. It looked like setting a dog to catch his own tail. Mind you, I don't say it can't be done. A dog can catch his own tail; they do do it," proclaimed the stranger in a low and emphatic undertone. "But," he added, moderating his utterance, "when they succeed—what gets anything out of it but the dog?" Bill Dancing, somewhat clouded and not deeming it well to be drawn into any damaging admissions, looked around for a cigar, and not seeing one, looked solemnly at the new



"Fogarty, Hell!" He Exclaimed

Solomon and stroked his beard. "That is how it looked to me at first," concluded the orator; "but, I say now it looks good to me, and as a stranger I may say I favor it."

Dancing tried to look unconcerned and seemed disposed to be friendly. "What might be your line of business?"

"Real estate. I am from Chicago. I sold everything that was for sale in Chicago and came here to stake out the Spanish Sinks and the Great Salt Lake—yes. It's drying up and there's an immense opportunity for claims along the shore. I've been looking into it."

"Into the claims or into the lake?" asked McCloud.

"Into both; and, Mr. McCloud, I want to say I favor Mr. Dancing's idea, that's all. Right wrongs no man. Let Bill see Sinclair and see what they can figure out." And having spoken, the stranger sank back and tried to look comfortable.

"I'll talk with you later about it, Bill," said McCloud, briefly.

"Meantime, Bill, see Sinclair and report," suggested the stranger.

"It's as good as done," announced Dancing, taking up his hat, "and, Mr. McCloud, might I have a little advance for cigars and things?"

"Cigars and ammunition—of course. See Sykes, William, see Sykes; if the office is closed go to his house—and see what will happen to you—" added the visitor in an aside, "and tell him to telephone up to Mr. McCloud for instruction," he concluded, unceremoniously.

"Now why do you want to start Bill on a fool business like that?" asked McCloud, as Bill Dancing took long steps from the room toward the office of Sykes, the cashier.

"He didn't know me to-day, but he will to-morrow," said the stranger, reflectively. "Gods, what I've seen that man go through in the days of the giants! Why, George, this will keep the boys talking, and they have to do something. Spend the money; the company is making it too fast any day; they moved 22,000 cars one day last week. Personally I'm glad to have a little fun out of it; it will be hell pure and undefiled long before we get through. This will be an easy way of letting Sinclair know I am here. Bill will report me confidentially to him as a suspicious personage."

To the astonishment of Sykes, the superintendent confirmed over the telephone Dancing's statement that he was to draw some expense money. Bill asked for \$25. Sykes offered him two, and Bill with some indignation accepted five. He spent all of this in trying to find Sinclair, and on the strength of his story to the boys borrowed five dollars more to prosecute the search. At ten o'clock that night he ran into Sinclair playing cards in the big rooms above the Three Horses.

The Three Horses still rears its hospitable two-story front in Fort Street, the only one of the Medicine Bend gambling houses that goes back to the days of '67; and it is the boast of its owners that since the key was thrown away, 39 years ago, its doors have never been closed, night or day, except once for two hours during the funeral of Dave Hawk. Bill Dancing drew Sinclair from his game and told him of the talk with McCloud, touching it up with natural enthusiasm. The brigadier took the news in high good humor and slapped Dancing on the back. "Did you see him alone, Bill?" asked Sinclair, with interest.

"Come over here, come along. I want you to meet a good friend. Here, Harvey, shake hands with Bill Dancing. Bill, this is old Harvey Du Sang, meanest man in the mountains to his

enemies and the whitest to his friends—eh, Harvey?"

Harvey seemed uncommunicative. Studying his hand, he asked in a sour way whether it was a jackpot, and upon being told that it was not, pushed forward some chips and looked stupidly up—though Harvey was by no means stupid. "Proud to know you, sir," said Bill, bending frankly as he put out his hand. "Proud to know any friend of Murray Sinclair's. What might be your business?"

Again Du Sang appeared abstracted. He looked up at the giant lineman, who, in spite of his own size and strength, could have crushed him between his fingers, and hitched his chair a little, but got no further toward an answer and paid no attention whatever to Bill's extended hand.

"Cow business, Bill," interposed Sinclair. "Where? Why, up near the park, Bill, up near the park. Bill is an old friend of mine, Harvey. Shake hands with George Seagru, Bill, and you know Henry Karg—and old Stormy Gorman—well, I guess you know him, too," exclaimed Sinclair, introducing the other players. "Look here a minute, Harvey."

Harvey, much against his inclination, was drawn from the table and retired with Sinclair and Dancing to an empty corner, where Dancing told his story again. At the conclusion of it Harvey rather snorted. Sinclair asked questions. "Was anybody else there when you saw McCloud, Bill?"

"One man," answered Bill, impressively.

"Who?"

"A stranger to me."

"A stranger? What did he look like?"

"Slender man and kind of odd talking, with a sandy mustache."

"Hear his name?"

"He told me his name, but it's skipped me, I declare. He's kind of dark-complected like."

"Stranger, eh?" mused Du Sang; his eyes were wandering over the room.

"Slender man," repeated Bill, "but I didn't take much notice of him. Said he was in the real estate business."

"In the real estate business? And did he sit there while you talked this over with the college guy?" muttered Du Sang.

"He is all right, boys, and he said you'd know his name if I could speak it," declared Bill.

"Look anything like that man standing with his hands in his pockets over there by the wheel?" asked Du Sang, turning his back carefully on a newcomer as he made the suggestion.

"Where—there? No! Yes, hold on, that's the man there now! Hold on, now!" urged Bill, struggling with the excitement of ten hours and ten dollars in one day. "His name sounded like Fogarty."

As Dancing spoke, Sinclair's eyes riveted on the new face at the other side of the gambling room. "Fogarty, hell!" he exclaimed, starting. "Stand right still, Du Sang; don't look around. That man is Whispering Smith."

CHAPTER XI.

Parley.

It was recalled one evening not long ago at the Wickup that the affair with Sinclair had all taken place within a period of two years, and that practically all of the actors in the event had been together and in friendly relation on a Thanksgiving day at the Dunning ranch not so very long before the trouble began. Dickie Dunning was away at school at the time, and Lance Dunning was celebrating with a riding and shooting fest and a barbecue.



The whole country had been invited. Bucks was in the mountains on an inspection trip, and Bill Dancing drove him with a party of railroad men over from Medicine Bend. The mountain men for 150 miles around were out. Gene and Bob Johnson, from Oroville and the Peace river, had come with their friends. From Williams Cache there was not only a big delegation—more of one than was really desirable—but it was led by old John Rebstock himself. When the invitation is general, lines cannot be too closely drawn. Not only was Lance Dunning something of a sport himself, but on the Long Range it is part of a stockman's creed to be on good terms with his neighbors. At a Thanksgiving day barbecue not even a mountain sheriff would ask questions.

Among the railroad people were George McCloud, Anderson, the assistant superintendent, Farrell Kennedy, chief of the special service, and his right-hand man, Bob Scott. In especial, Sinclair's presence at the barbecue was recalled. He had some cronies with him from among his up-country following, and was introducing his new bridge foreman, Karg, afterward known as Flat Nose, and George Seagru, the Montana cowboy. Sinclair fraternized that day with the Williams Cache men, and it was remarked even then that though a railroad man he appeared somewhat outside the railroad circle. When the shooting matches were announced a brown-eyed railroad man was asked to enter. He had been out of the mountains for some time and was a comparative stranger in the gathering, but the Williams Cache men had not forgotten him; Rebstock, especially, wanted to see him shoot. While much of the time out of the mountains on railroad business, he was known to be closely in Bucks' councils, and as to the mountains themselves, "he was reputed to know them better than Bucks or Glover himself knew them. This was Whispering Smith; but, beyond a low-voiced greeting or an expression of surprise at meeting an old acquaintance, he avoided talk. When urged to shoot he resisted all persuasion and backed up his refusal by showing a bruise on his trigger finger. He declined even to act as judge in the contest, suggesting the sheriff, Ed Banks, for that office.

McCloud did not meet the host, Lance Dunning, that day nor since the day of the barbecue had Du Sang or Sinclair seen Whispering Smith until the night Du Sang spotted him near the wheel in the Three Horses. Du Sang at once drew out of his game and left the room. Sinclair in the meantime had undertaken a quarrel-some interview with Whispering Smith. "I supposed you knew I was here," said Smith to him, amiably. "Of course I don't travel in a private car or carry a billboard on my back, but I haven't been hiding."

"The last time we talked," returned Sinclair, measuring words carefully, "you were going to stay out of the mountains."

"I should have been glad to, Murray. Affairs are in such shape on the division now that somebody had to come, so they sent for me."

The two men were sitting at a table. Whispering Smith was cutting and leisurely mixing a pack of cards. "Well, so far as I'm concerned, I'm out of it," Sinclair went on after a pause, "but, however that may be, if you're back here looking for trouble there's no reason, I guess, why you can't find it."

"That's not it. I'm not here looking for trouble; I'm here to fix this thing up. What do you want?"

"Not a thing."

"I'm willing to do anything fair and right," declared Whispering Smith, raising his voice a little above the hum of the rooms.

"Fair and right is an old song."

"And a good one to sing in this country just now. I'll do anything I can to adjust any grievance, Murray. What do you want?"

Sinclair for a moment was silent, and his answer made plain his unwillingness to speak at all. "There never would have been a grievance if I'd been treated like a white man." His eyes burned sullenly. "I've been treated like a dog."

"That is not it."

"That is it," declared Sinclair, savagely, "and they'll find it's it."

"Murray, I want to say only this—only this to make things clear. Bucks feels that he's been treated worse than a dog."

"Then let him put me back where I belong."

"It's a little late for that, Murray; a little late," said Smith, gently. "Shouldn't you rather take good money and get off the division? Mind you, I say good money, Murray—and peace."

Sinclair answered without the slightest hesitation: "Not while that man McCloud is here."

Whispering Smith smiled. "I've got no authority to kill McCloud."

"There are plenty of men in the mountains that don't need any."

"But let's start fair," urged Whispering Smith, softly. He leaned forward with one finger extended in con-

science. "Don't let us have any misunderstanding on the start. Let McCloud alone. If he is killed—now I'm speaking fair and open and making no threats, but I know how it will come out—there will be nothing, but killing here for six months. We will make just that memorandum on McCloud. Now about the main question. Every sensible man in the world wants something."

"I know men that have been going a long time without what they wanted."

Smith flashed and nodded. "You needn't have said that, but no matter. Every sensible man wants something. Murray. This is a big country. There's a World's Fair running somewhere all the time in it. Why not travel a little? What do you want?"

"I want my job, or I want a new superintendent here."

"Just exactly the two things, and, by heavens! the only two, I can't manage. Come once more and I'll meet you."

"No!" Sinclair rose to his feet. "No—damn your money! This is my home. The high country is my country; it's where my friends are."

"It's filled with your friends; I know that. But don't put your trust in your friends. They will stay by you, I know; but once in a long while there will be a false friend, Murray, one that will sell you—remember that."

"I stay."

Whispering Smith looked up in admiration. "I know you're game. It isn't necessary for me to say that to you. But think of the fight you are going into against this company. You can worry them; you've done it. But a bronco might as well try to buck a locomotive as for one man or six or 600 to win out in the way you are playing."

"I will look out for my friends; others—" Sinclair hitched his belt and paused, but Whispering Smith, cutting and running the cards, gave no heed. His eyes were fixed on the green cloth under his fingers. "Others—" repeated Sinclair.

"Others?" echoed Whispering Smith, good-naturedly.

"May look out for themselves."

"Of course, of course! Well, if this is the end of it, I'm sorry."

"You will be sorry if you mix in a quarrel that is none of yours."

"Why, Murray, I never had a quarrel with a man in my life."

"You are pretty smooth, but you can't drive me out of this country. I



"Then Keep Away from Her!"

know how well you'd like to do it; and, take notice, there's one trail you can't cross even if you stay here. I suppose you understand that."

Smith felt his heart leap. He sat in his chair turning the pack slowly, but with only one hand now; the other hand was free. Sinclair eyed him sidewise. Smith moistened his lips and when he replied spoke slowly:

"There is no need of dragging any abduction to her into it. For that matter, I told Bucks he should have sent any man but me. If I'm in the way, Sinclair, if my presence here is all that stands in the way, I'll go back and stay back as before, and send any one else you like or Bucks likes. Are you willing to say that I stand in the way of a settlement?"

Sinclair sat down and put his hands on the table. "No; your matter and mine is another affair. All I want between you and me is fair and right."

Whispering Smith's eyes were on the cards. "You're always had it."

"Then keep away from her."

"Don't tell me what to do."

"Then don't tell me."

"I'm not telling you. You will do as you please; so will I. I left here because Marion asked me to. I am here now because I have been sent here. It is in the course of my business. I have my living to earn and my friends to protect. Don't dictate to me, because it would be of no use."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Five thousand guests at one time were registered on the new battleship Mississippi at New Orleans and the big ship was not overcrowded. The experts who were predicting that the big type of battleship would go out of world favor are nursing badly-sprained imaginations.